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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001718

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/14/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: MALDIVES: IN-LAW OF PRESIDENT ELECTED SPEAKER OF SPECIAL MAJLIS; NDI AND AI EXPRESS CONCERN FOLLOWING VISITS

REF: A. COLOMBO 1704

[B](#). COLOMBO 1686

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Abbas Ibrahim, the brother-in-law of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, was elected Speaker of the Special Majlis by open ballot on October 14. Shaheen Hameed, Gayoom's nephew, was elected Deputy Speaker. Ibrahim received 70 of the votes from the 98 MPs attending; former front-runner and current detainee Ibrahim Gasim received five. Eleven or twelve Special Majlis MPs walked out in protest over the absence of a secret ballot in the voting process. It is unclear whether they will return when the Special Majlis reconvenes next week. With the Speaker elected, the next order of business for the Special Majlis will be to consider proposed reforms (including a draft by President Gayoom) to the Constitution. A delegation from Amnesty International (AI) told the Ambassador on October 15 that the Government had agreed to allow AI to comment on the draft. (Note: AI has not yet seen the draft.)

[1](#)2. (C) A two-person delegation from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), who visited Maldives at the request of UNDP, told the Ambassador on October 15 that interviews conducted with residents of remote islands revealed deep-seated and wide-spread skepticism about the Government's actual intent to reform. In NDI's view, Gayoom likely underestimates the level of pro-reform sentiment, assuming it is limited to a few prominent activists in the capital. NDI's report on the visit will include recommendations on laws governing political parties; the creation of a civil service; the enforcement of constitutional rights; and the establishment of civic education programs.

[1](#)3. (C) The findings of the AI delegation, which had an opportunity to meet with detainees in private, confirmed that while physical abuse had ended once the detainees were moved to Dhoonidhoo Island, many exhibited signs of mental and psychological stress. Some of the female detainees reported incidents of sexual abuse by arresting authorities when they were first apprehended. Some of the improvements to the detainees' situation promised following the Ambassador's October 6-7 visit have already been instituted (Ref B). According to Moez Doraid, UNDP Resident Representative, at least some of the detainees have now been given access to legal counsel. The AI delegation reported that some detainees were being allowed very limited space in which to exercise (i.e., given access to the small walkway in front of their cell doors), while others were not. Reading and writing materials had not yet been provided, AI Legal Advisor Debra Long noted, but she believed that they would be soon. The AI team had met with all seven female detainees, three of whom were released immediately thereafter. The team expressed concern about the remaining four female detainees, noting that all seemed to have been detained because of their connections to male political activists, rather than for any infringement of law.

[1](#)4. (C) The AI delegation noted an apparently genuine desire for reform among certain sectors of the Government, and said they were seeking the best ways to encourage those reformers. The reform process will be lengthy--especially revisions to the Penal Code and criminal justice system. In the interim, the delegation will urge the Government to consider implementing short-term remedial measures (such as instituting a system of bail) that could alleviate some of the concerns about the detainees' welfare.

LUNSTEAD